

CHICAGO – With General David Petraeus testifying before the House Armed Services and Foreign Affairs Committees in Washington today, U.S. Representatives Mark Kirk (R-Highland Park) and Dan Lipinski (D-Western Springs) discussed the path ahead in Iraq along with diplomats, counterterrorism experts and military leaders at a roundtable session sponsored by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

Congressmen Kirk and Lipinski were joined by Ambassador Henry Crumpton (the leader of the CIA's campaign that deposed Al Qaeda in Afghanistan), Ambassador Robert Gelbard (the former head of all US international aid to rule-of-law and police programs), and Col. Paul Hughes (the military staff expert of the Iraq Study Group).

"To begin a meaningful conversation about the options the United States and the world community might employ in tackling the path forward in Iraq and the Middle East, Congressman Lipinski and I joined in a bipartisan effort to open a constructive, non-political dialogue for the benefit of citizens in both our constituencies," said Congressman Kirk during opening remarks at today's event. "We are grateful for the opportunity to lead this roundtable discussion about the most important issue before the nation -- the path ahead in Iraq. We can no longer allow this important debate to be handled in a Republican or Democrat manner. As elected officials it is our job to set aside partisan politics and get to the heart of the matter. How do we communicate to the American people what 'getting out' of Iraq will likely entail?"

Before an audience of Chicago Council on Global Affairs members, the Representatives and the panelists discussed the state of affairs in Iraq and the Middle East and the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group, among other topics.

Ambassador Crumpton discussed his experience fighting terrorism in Afghanistan and Iraq. As the man in charge of police assistance programs, Ambassador Gelbard discussed the challenges ahead for the Iraqi National Police. Additionally, Col. Paul Hughes, who led the Iraq Study Group's Military and Security Expert Working Group, discussed the military progress of the surge.

Congressmen Kirk and Lipinski are cosponsors of H.R. 2574, the Iraq Study Group Recommendations Implementation Act of 2007. The legislation would require the President and Congress to enact the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group. The Iraq Study Group is a

nonpartisan organization that made independent assessments on the future of Iraq. The group was co-chaired by former Secretary of State James Baker and former Congressman Lee Hamilton. The group released its final report last December with 79 recommendations regarding expanded diplomacy, training for Iraqi police and security forces, revenue sharing for oil resources and benchmarks for political reconciliation. To date, congressional leaders have not permitted a bipartisan vote on the Study Group recommendations.

“The time has come to stabilize our direction in Iraq. I believe it is time to wind down the mission in Iraq but in a responsible manner. Two wars in Iraq are enough and we need to end this conflict in a manner that will not call for our military to return,” said Kirk. “The Iraq Study Group recommendations provide a good roadmap for the United States to accomplish key objectives in Iraq while reducing the cost. It is my hope that Congress quickly passes this legislation.”